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*CREATING A NEW LITERATURE:  
SHIMAZAKI TŌSON'S POETRY AND THE JAPANESE LITERARY REFORM MOVEMENT*

By

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Undergraduate Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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Creating a New Literature: Shimazaki Tōson's Poetry and the Japanese Literary Reform  
Movement

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This research project shows how the poetry of writer Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943) influenced Japanese literary and language reform movements during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Although Tōson's fiction has often been the focus of critical studies and research, the impact his poetry had on these reform movements and on the shape of modern Japanese literature tends to be overlooked. In this paper, I show the importance of these overlooked works by examining a wide range of Tōson's poems and focusing on the way that they blend classical Japanese natural themes and rhythm, most commonly a 5-7-5 or related syllable pattern, with contemporary Western Romanticism. Upon examination of Tōson's poetry, it becomes clear that these works acted as a bridge between classical literature and contemporary colloquial speech patterns, as well as a bridge between classical Japanese literature and modern, more Western-influenced styles. This bridging process was key to the redefinition of Japanese literature in the modern period. In turn, these changes brought written styles closer to the Japanese actually spoken by most citizens and helped to expand the readership of Japanese literature while showing that this new style could still ring with the rhythm and beauty of traditional Japanese literary forms. Demonstrating the influential nature of Tōson's poetry for Japanese language and literary reform movements, this thesis highlights the importance of often overlooked writing during a transitional period in the history of Japanese literature.

Throughout his long career as a writer, Shimazaki Tōson (島崎藤村, 1872-1943)<sup>1</sup> wrote many works that would help to alter the course of modern Japanese literature. His novels, beginning with *The Broken Commandment*, 1906, often deal with the internal and external struggles of men and women on the fringes of society. Though he is not commonly the focus of Western studies, Tōson's contribution to the body and shape of Japanese literature is widely acknowledged, and his work is considered foundational in both Japanese Romanticism and Japanese Naturalism. However, his collections of poetry, which were published between 1897 and 1901,<sup>2</sup> are consistently overlooked. In the world of modern Japanese literature, the novel is seen as the highest form of modern literature. This means that Tōson's poetry is almost always skipped over or mentioned only briefly before a Japanese critic moves into an analysis of his novels, and the trend has carried into Western writing on Japanese literature as well. Some critics, like Edwin McClellan, have even argued that Tōson's shift from writing poetry to writing prose shows the evolution of his style as a literary figure (McClellan 77-8). In essence, these critics argue that Tōson chose prose over the poetic form as he developed as a writer, and an analysis of Tōson's poetry is therefore of little value. In this thesis, I argue that Tōson's poetry played an important role in the development of a modern literary style and that, in overlooking his poetry, we lose a valuable perspective on the shape of Japanese literature from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

Tōson's poetry is important for several key reasons. Firstly, the fact that many of Tōson's contemporary writers also wrote poetry, especially early in their careers, is sometimes ignored in the grander scope of Japanese literary criticism. Many of the authors who we consider to be Japan's foundational modern writers, including Tōson, Natsume Sōseki (夏目漱石 1867-1916), Mori Ōgai (森鷗外 1862-1922), and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (芥川龍之介 1892-1927), began their career as poets or wrote poetry throughout the course of their career. Writing poetry and experimenting with poetic styles was not something that Tōson did as a passing fancy before he evolved beyond the form and began to write prose—it was a rich aspect of contemporary literary

- 1 In this thesis, I will use the traditional Japanese format of writing names, with the surname first and the given name second. In this case, Shimazaki is the author's surname and Tōson, though not his actual given name, is a pen name that he adopted when he began writing. Following Japanese custom, I will refer to him as Tōson rather than by his surname.
- 2 *Wakanashū* (若菜集, *Collection of Young Herbs*, 1897), *Hitohabune* (一葉舟, *One Small Boat*, 1898), *Natsukusa* (夏草, *Summer Grass*, 1898), *Rakubaishū* (落梅集, *Collection of Fallen Plums*, 1901), *Tōsonshishū* (藤村詩集, *Tōson's Collected Poems*, 1904)

culture, and in writing poetry Tōson was part of a wide circle of other young writers with whom he would have discussed and refined his work. Secondly, Tōson's work is considered to be a successful representation of poetry in the *shintaiishi* (新体詩, New Style Poetry) movement, the aim of which was to “produce a modern, colloquial Japanese poetry that was beholden neither to the supposedly “dead language” of [classical] Japanese nor to “foreign” Chinese vocabulary” (Bourdagh 7). Tōson's poetry combines the prosody, as well as natural and personal themes, of Japanese *tanka* (短歌, literally “short poem or song”)<sup>3</sup> poetry with the sense of awe at the beauty and power of nature and the strong emotional aesthetics of Western Romanticism. In doing so, he shows that it is possible to create a poetic style that is reminiscent of classical Japanese poetical forms but uses these forms in an innovative way to express the desires and concerns of his generation. Tōson's work also reminds us of the role that poetry played in the development of Japanese literature from its birth over a thousand years ago. In fact, the earliest surviving Japanese works, the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*, 古事記, 712) and the *Nihonshoki* (*The Chronicles of Japan*, 日本書紀, 720) contain origin legends for the Japanese islands and people, historical information of varying accuracy, and large collections of poetry. Poetry was also an important part of early Japanese prose writing, and songs and poems feature heavily in works like *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*, 源氏物語, early 11<sup>th</sup> century). In his critical work on the role that Tōson's writing plays in modern Japanese nationalism, Bourdagh insists on the continuing cultural importance of poetry, arguing that “the modern novel may be crucial to establishing the linear time of national narratives, but in order to rescue a sense of meaningfulness from the randomness of death, prosaic national imagination must be supplemented with poesie, a poetic strain that provides an aesthetic guarantee of the nation's eternal existence at a transcendental level” (Bourdagh 2). In this way, Tōson's poetry is important for understanding Japanese literary tradition, understanding the evolution of writing between the Meiji Restoration and the modern day, and understanding the continuing importance of poetry in Japanese literature and culture. In translating and analyzing four of Tōson's poems, I demonstrate that his poetry displays an application of the *shintaiishi* movement that shows that

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3 This began as a connecting poem between two longer poems but came to refer to the 5-7-5-7-7 mora poetic structure that was the most common form of poetry throughout much of Japanese history, and indeed came to represent Japanese classical poetry as a whole. *Tanka* is the modern term; the pre-modern term is *waka* (和歌, Japanese-style poems)

classical, high literary Japanese and contemporary colloquial Japanese, as well as rhythm and themes from Japanese and Western Romantic poetry, could work in harmony in the same piece, and that this in turn influenced the shape of Japanese literature through the twentieth century and to the present day.

Shimazaki Tōson was born Shimazaki Haruki on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1872. He was born the seventh child and fourth son of an old samurai family who lived in Magome, a small town in West-Chikuma County in Nagano Prefecture, a mountainous prefecture located in central Japan. Though situated between two of Japan's largest urban areas, the Tokyo area and the Osaka-Kyoto area, Tōson's hometown was quite rural. In his biography of Tōson, Naff writes that “his given name, literally “Spring tree,” was inspired by the camellias in bloom at the time of his birth” (Naff 63). The beauty of the natural surroundings of his youth would continue to influence Tōson, and especially his writing, throughout his life. In April of 1881, when Tōson was nine years old, his father decided to send him and his older brother to study in Tokyo. Though Tōson left Magome as a child and spent many of his most formative years in Tokyo, the rural spirit and appreciation for nature never left him. Cecilia Seigle comments that he “was educated in Tokyo and was sophisticated in his taste and thinking, but his love for his home province stayed with him throughout his life, and he had a rural, unurbane side to his character” (199). Combined with the fact that he moved from place to place as a child, this gave the young Tōson an air of quiet reticence that would come to color his writing.

Tōson's father died in November of 1886, the year that Tōson graduated from elementary school. Shortly thereafter he entered Meiji Gakuin, which was a Presbyterian school run by James Curtis Hepburn (1815-1911) and other important missionary educators, whose work as thinkers and as teachers had a substantial impact on Westernization in certain sectors, especially literature and philosophy, during the early decades of the Meiji period. At Meiji Gakuin, these Presbyterian teachers worked alongside Japanese teachers to ensure that the students studied both Western and Japanese works. This school would help to shape the way that Tōson thought and, later, the way that he wrote. His classes were taught mostly in English, and he received a rigorous education in language and literature, among other subjects. Christianity was another element of Tōson's education at Meiji Gakuin, and one that would influence his thought and writing throughout his life. In 1888, at the age of sixteen, Tōson was baptized by one of his old

teachers. Within a few years, Tōson had changed from a sociable young man into a stressed and moody teenager. One of the sources of this stress was a discovery of sex and sexuality, which was in conflict with his Christianity-centered education at Meiji Gakuin. Another was what Seigle calls “the tension between his worldliness and the Christian spirituality he had come to embrace in a school community that preached morality and ignored humanity” (200). This binary and the conflict that it created with him would stay with Tōson for his entire life and came to represent the tension that was a major part of his voice as a writer.

During this tumultuous period in Tōson's life, he turned to literature as a source of solace. He read extensively in Japanese and English, delving into such Western writers as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Goethe, Lord Byron, Swift, and Dante and such Japanese classical poets as Saigyō (西行 1118-1190), Bashō (芭蕉 1644-1694), and Saikaku (西鶴 1642-1693) (Seigle 200). Tōson's grades dropped and he became much less social, but his abilities in reading and translating English sharpened and an appreciation for the vastness of the literary world blossomed in his mind. McClellan remarks that with this expanding worldview came “a new self-awareness, a consciousness of the importance and dignity of one's feelings, which Tōson tried later to express” (74) in his poetry. It was during this quiet, contemplative period that Tōson first began to turn his ambitions toward becoming a writer.

Soon after his graduation from Meiji Gakuin in 1891, Tōson began teaching Japanese literature at Meiji Girls High School.<sup>4</sup> However, he quit within the year because of his feelings for a female student and took a wandering trip across the Japanese countryside. During this trip, Tōson wrote poetry and worked on a translation *Hamlet*. Upon his return to Tokyo, Tōson began to work for *Bungakkai* (Kanji + meaning) literary magazine and became close with several influential friends and mentors, including Kitamura Tōkoku (北村透谷 1868-1894), who was a strong literary and spiritual influence for Tōson. Just as Tōson has begun to explore the beginnings of his literary career, however, he was struck by a string of tragedies and hardships. His childhood home burned down, his oldest brother was imprisoned for forgery, his third brother, suffering from syphilis, came to live with him without providing any help for the

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4 This would be considered a college or perhaps a finishing school in modern terms. The term “High School” was often applied to post-secondary schools in Japan and provided the equivalent to a modern university education. Tōson was twenty years old when he began teaching there, and the girl he fell in love with, Satō Sukeko, was several months older than him (Seigle 201).

economic support of the household, his mother was diagnosed with cancer and sent to the hospital, and Sukeko, the girl he had fallen in love with during his brief teaching career at Meiji Girls High School and who had remained a friend in the intervening period, died of complications during her first pregnancy. Tōson returned to his work at the girls' school in an attempt to support his family, but as the tragedies continued to mount he grew overwhelmed and quit, only to have the school burn down two months later. Relief finally came when Tōson obtained a teaching position at Tōhoku Gakuin in Sendai in late 1896. This year-long stay in Sendai, a quiet town filled with the rural beauty that Tōson had grown to love in his early childhood, would provide inspiration for much of his early poetry, which was published in *Bungakkai* and collected in his first book, *Wakanashū* (若菜集, *Collection of Young Herbs*), in 1897.

Over the course of the next few years, Tōson continued to write and publish poetry. In 1899 he accepted the offer of a teaching position at a private school called Komoro Gijuku and moved to Komoro, a rural town only about a hundred miles from Tōson's birthplace. This move provided further inspiration and scope for Tōson's writing. During his time in Komoro, Tōson also began to write fictional sketches about the landscapes and people around him. These sketches would become a prominent foundational feature in his prose. Tōson believed that “the new age required a new literature, which in turn would be possible only with the creation of new expressions, even a new language” (Seigle 203) and, whether he set out with the intention to help create this new literature or not, his poetry and his early prose work reflected an evolving style that combined classical Japanese *tanka* rhythm and the fierce emotionality of Western Romanticism as well as the natural imagery common to both.

As he was struggling to develop his own voice and identity as a writer, Tōson experienced a series of marital difficulties and worked to support his wife and three young children on a small salary. When Tōson grew overwhelmed by the conflict between writing and his home life, between his search for a literary voice of his own and his need to support himself financially, he threw himself into reading. Tōson continued to explore Western works, this time immersing himself in writers like Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Zola, and Flaubert. Eventually he decided to move back to Tokyo to focus on writing his first novel. As before, this period was fraught with tragedy, much of it stemming from Tōson's financial instability and the fact that he



self-funded the publication of his first novel to retain artistic and stylistic integrity. The result of this intense period of writing was *The Broken Commandment* (破壊, *Hakai*, 1906), a novel about the social issues and challenges faced by a member of the Japanese untouchable class, which launched Tōson to national acclaim almost overnight. Tōson would continue to publish novels, most of them at least semi-autobiographical, for the rest of his life.

Despite his growing success as a writer, Tōson continued to experience tragedies and hardships. His wife died in 1910 of a hemorrhage shortly after giving birth to their seventh child. Though she and Tōson had not been especially close in the early years of their marriage, they had grown closer in the preceding years and her death, at the age of thirty-one, devastated him. Two nieces came to live with him shortly after her death and by 1912 he had begun a romantic relationship with one of them, a woman named Komako. When he discovered that she had become pregnant, Tōson kept his role as the baby's father a secret and fled to Paris rather than face his own shame. There, he mingled with Japanese and French writers and began to study the French language. Through this immersion in Western culture, Tōson gained new perspectives on both Western and Japanese culture and began to understand what he had in reality been experiencing for most of his life—what Seigle refers to as “the efficacy of the arts in bringing about mutual understanding of people from various nationalities” (209). With the support of a group of writers, Tōson stayed in Europe despite the outbreak of World War One and did not return to Japan until 1916.

Upon his return, Tōson resumed his relationship with Komako. His next novel, *A New Life* (kanji, 1918-19), served as an autobiographical confession of the love and shame he had felt over the course of this affair. Tōson was afraid that it would damage his career as a writer, but it was a great success. It did, however, damage his relationships with family members, most of whom had not known the full details of his affair with Komako before *A New Life* was published. He spent much of the next decade writing short pieces and trying to be a better father to his children, writing stories for them, providing financial assistance, sending his oldest son to Meiji Gakuin, and encouraging them to travel abroad. After many long years of research, Tōson's next novel and the last that would be published before his death, *Before the Dawn* (kanji), was released in 1935. It is a work of biographical historical fiction that retells the story of his father's life, including the turbulence of the Meiji Restoration and how an inability to deal with the

conflict and change it brought drove his father to insanity—a feeling that Tōson, having experienced these changes in perhaps a slightly different way as a member of the first post-Meiji Restoration generation, would necessarily have understood and identified with. *Before the Dawn* is often considered to be Tōson's greatest work. Tōson died at age 71 on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1943.

Before I delve into an analysis of four of Tōson's poems, it is necessary to provide a brief background on the history of Japanese literature up to the period in which he was writing. Throughout Japanese history, perhaps the most famous and common form of poetry has been the *tanka* (短歌), which means “short poem.” The oldest recorded native books in Japanese history, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, both contain a number of *tanka*, showing that this form had already developed by the early eighth century. The oldest anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Manyōshū* (万葉集, *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*, finished after 759), contains many *chōka* (長歌, long poems) followed or set off by a number of shorter *tanka* poems. The *tanka* became the dominant form of early Japanese poetry after the compilation of the *Kokinshū*<sup>5</sup> during the Heian period. The haiku, comprising the first 5-7-5 segment of the traditional *tanka* structure, had developed as a dependent form by the 1600s.

Dean Brink calls Japanese poetry, especially the *tanka*, a “poetics of allusion” because allusion and multiple meanings are “as fundamental [to Japanese poetry] as metaphor, image, and iambic pentameter are to English poetry” (631). *Tanka* often play with multiple meanings or ambiguous words and phrases in order to add layers of depth and complexity to what is otherwise a short poem. From the time of the *Manyōshū* on, reflections on nature or the seasons and personal reflections have been the most common themes of *tanka*.

The *tanka* underwent a modern revival in the late 1800s and early 1900s in part due to the efforts of poets such as Masaoka Shiki (正岡子規 1867-1902), Yosano Tekkan (与謝野鉄幹 1873-1935), and Yosano Akiko (与謝野晶子 1878-1942). These poets were Tōson's contemporaries, and it is likely that their revitalization and redefinition of Japanese poetry, especially the *tanka*, contributed to Tōson's early interest in the poetic form. In his essay *Bunkai Yatsu Atari* (文界八つ当り, “Indiscriminate Attacks on the Literary World,” 1893), Shiki “presented in embryo form two of the central ideas of his *tanka* reform, ideas reminiscent of those presented in his haiku

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5 Full name *Kokinwakashū*, 古今和歌集, *Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times*. The finished form dates from about 920 CE.

criticism: first, that the *tanka* must end its artistic isolation and seek to fulfill the more universal standards of literature; and second, that it must broaden its range of subject and vocabulary if it were to survive” (Beichman 74). Tōson's poetry achieved this sense of revival through expanding on the vocabulary, grammar, structure, and content of more traditional styles like the *tanka*.

Tōson's poetry also combines elements of the *tanka* with themes, such as wandering, and differing poetic structures that are reminiscent of Western Romantic poetry. The Romantic understanding of poetry is perhaps best expressed in John Stuart Mill's lines from his 1833 essay “What is Poetry?” Mill argues, “poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or uttering forth of feeling. But if we may be excused the seeming affectation of the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and bodying itself forth in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind” (Zimmerman 1). The notion of poetry as something *overheard*, something written in solitude from the deepest emotions of its author and thus something incredibly personal and even confessional, filled with spontaneous joy and the sheer power of emotions as they strike the poet and narrator, is something that would have appealed to Tōson in his youth, especially in his period of introversion at intense private study at Meiji Gakuin. During these formational years, as Tōson struggled with the conflicts between Christianity and sexuality and between self and other that raged inside of him, reading of the personal revelatory nature of Romantic poetry would surely have deepened his interest in it. When Tōson began to write poetry in earnest in the mid-1890s, this is the kind of poetry he set out to write.

These are two styles of poetry, one Japanese and one Western, that had a large role in influencing Tōson's writing. In combining elements such as rhythm and theme from these styles, Tōson showed not only that Western and Japanese poetic language could work in harmony within the same piece of literature but also that beauty, approachability, and sophistication could coexist in literary Japanese through a mixture of old and new styles, classical grammar and more contemporary language.

Another reason why Tōson's poetry was so influential was that it adopted some

contemporary speech patterns, as well as using grammar and phrases from classical Japanese poetry, in a way that made his work easier to read and relevant to a much wider audience. Part of this was due to the distance between literary and spoken Japanese at the time. By the beginning of the Meiji period, a large gap had grown between the colloquial spoken form of Japanese and the more academic, literary form of the language. The literary form of Japanese still included many classical traits, including different orthographies. For example, though the pronunciation of the classical verb ending –Fu had long since changed to –u in contemporary spoken Japanese, –Fu carried on as a written element of literary Japanese well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kanji use also varied, meaning that the forms of a certain kanji changed from author to author. Many grammatical styles from classical Japanese, which had long since disappeared from the everyday spoken language, were also retained in literary writing. For example, the classical suffix *keri*, which has a variety of meanings, including a sense of storytelling and a sense of personal revelation, continued to be widely used in Meiji period literature and is often seen in Tōson’s poetry and prose. By the time that Tōson was writing, several different arguments in favor of reforming the literary language had begun to circulate. These movements were “a major feature of Meiji culture and literature, a catalyst of the synergies that, generated by exposure to the West, contributed to the creation of not only modern Japanese literature, but also the modern Japanese nation” (“Quest for a New Written Language” 333). The reform movement as a whole is often called *genbun’itchi* (言文一致),<sup>6</sup> which refers to the unification of spoken and written styles. It is important to note, however, that language reform was never one unified movement but a series of different arguments, parts of which eventually became adopted by different writers until a more unified style had been developed. Nanette Twine explains the hesitance that some academics felt in regards to proposed literary language reform. She writes that “rather than viewing the written word as an instrument of communication, its purpose to inform or persuade as effectively as possible, Japanese scholars looked upon it as a kind of show-case for intellectual showmanship, subordinating content to form in the pursuit of ostentatious erudition” (Twine 19). Many scholars who opposed the reform movement feared that, in changing the literary language, much of its beauty and sophistication would be lost, bringing it to the “low” or artless level of the

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6 The first character in this phrase refers to spoken language and the second character refers to literature. The final two characters mean “union” or “conformity.”

common spoken language, which had undergone an extensive standardization process around the time of the Meiji Restoration. However, other authors, including many young authors from Tōson's generation, felt that the literary style had grown too distant from the realities of life in contemporary Japan and could therefore not express all of the emotions and experiences that they wanted to articulate in their writing. Tessa Carroll argues that many of these pro-literary reform writers, among whom Fukuzawa Yukichi (福澤諭吉 1835-1901) was an especially vocal figure, were promoting the continued dissolution of pre-Meiji class barriers by asserting that the colloquial language did have a place in high literature (Carroll 59). The call for a reformed literary style reflected the desire to expand readership and to include the experience of common Japanese people in literature.

From the beginning, then, the *genbun'itchi* movement was never a single, unified movement but rather a plethora of different arguments, some of which grew to be much more powerful and influential than others. I will give a brief outline of a few of these important movements here and will go into more detail about how Tōson's poetry was influenced by and conversely affected these movements as I analyze his poems.

One of the earlier precursors to literary reform movements in the late 1800s and early 1900s was Tsubouchi Shōyō's (坪内逍遙 1859-1935) *gazoku setchū buntai* (雅俗折衷),<sup>7</sup> an early style that argued for a blend of classical and colloquial techniques. Shōyō was an early proponent of the novel as a high literary form and argued for its place as an art form in *The Essence of the Novel* (小説神髓, *Shousetsushin*~ romanized name, 1885-6). Twine writes of Shōyō that "by virtue of his innovating suggestions for the future development of Japanese fiction, stemming from western literary theories which were no longer new in Europe but represented a startling departure from tradition in Japan, Tsubouchi...was to exert a profound influence on the emerging young writers of the time" (Twine 133-4). Indeed, within two decades of the publication of *The Essence of the Novel*, the novel was coming to be regarded as the highest and most innovative form of Japanese literature. This movement helps to explain why Tōson's poetry is not commonly studied or regarded as having influenced the shape of modern Japanese literature.

The *shintaiishi* movement was also an influential early movement in Japanese literary

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7 This phrase means a cross or blending between the refined and the vulgar, the classical and the colloquial.

reform and one that had a direct influence on Tōson's writing. *Shintaishi* first emerged in 1882 with the publication of *A Selection of Poetry in the New Style*<sup>8</sup> by Toyama Masakazu (外山正一 1848-1900), Yatabe Ryōkichi (矢田部良吉 1852-1899), and Inoue Tetsujirō (井上哲次郎 1855-1944). This was a work that included original Japanese poetry and translations of pieces by Western writers like Thomas Gray and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In an essay on the development of modern Japanese poetry, Massimiliano Tomasi writes that “language was a special concern for the compilers of this volume. Exposure to Western poetry had caused them to recognize the excessive gap between the language of traditional Japanese poetry and the one actually spoken by the people” (“The Rise of a New Poetic Form” 109). These authors advocated the use of more colloquial Japanese in order to express emotions and experiences, as well as the growing influence of western works, that they felt the older, more restricted classical vocabulary could not accurately capture. This *shintaishi* was not a complete break from classical styles but a reshaping of classical forms and an expansion of traditional vocabulary to reflect contemporary idioms and speech patterns.

One focus of the *shintaishi* movement was on poetic meter. The authors of the first *shintaishi* collection and the advocates of the style “questioned the need for a fixed syllabic pattern in poetry as well as the necessity of defining poetry on the basis of that pattern” (“The Rise of a New Poetic Form” 111). They saw the strict 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic structure of classical *tanka* poetry and the similarly fixed structure of other styles as constricting and argued that the definition of poetry, especially high literary poetry, based on this rigid structure must change if poetry was to continue to be an important literary form. These *shintaishi* advocates also called for a “reconsideration of the relationship between content and form” (“The Rise of a New Poetic Form 111), arguing that, though the rigid *tanka* and haiku forms might be appropriate for certain poems, they did not reflect the variety of forms that some contemporary poets felt were necessary to express the diverse experiences and emotions of the time. A rise in the readership of Western poetry, presented in both structured and more open forms, contributed heavily to this idea that the *tanka* alone was not versatile enough as a poetic style. Finally, the use of the colloquial style, as opposed to the use of more classical diction and grammar, was also an important issue in the *shintaishi* movement. Because poetic language had been strongly

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8 *Shintaishishō* 『新体詩抄』 丸家善七 1882

established for a thousand years by the time that these authors were writing, “the feasibility of a literary language based on the colloquial, already a reality in the realm of prose, seemed quite unthinkable to many” (“The Rise of a New Poetic Form” 111). Even when Tōson began writing poetry, fifteen years after the first *shintaiishi* treatise was published, the use of colloquial diction in poetry was unusual. Though Tōson utilized some colloquial forms in his poetry, the use of classical grammar and vocabulary is still common in his works.

Tōson's poetry is often considered to be an important example of *shintaiishi*, and the influence that this movement's ideas had on his writing is apparent. His work does not follow traditional *tanka* structure, though it often retains a syllabic structure related to the 5-7-5-7-7 structure of *tanka* or the 5-7-5 structure of haiku. As the advocates of the *shintaiishi* movement argued, one style alone was too narrow to represent the wide and often conflicting range of experiences and emotions contained in Tōson's poetry, and his works instead follow a variety of forms depending on their content.

Though there were many other literary reform movements before and during the time that Tōson was active as a writer, the two that I have listed are some of the movements that had the largest impact on Tōson and many of his contemporaries. Through asserting the place of colloquial language in literature and upholding the notion that classical and colloquial forms could work in synchronism within a single piece of literature, these movements helped to influence the shape and growth of modern Japanese literature.

I will now move into an analysis of four of Tōson's poems. The first three of these poems were published in *Collection of Young Herbs*, 1897, and the final one was published in *Collection of Fallen Plums*, 1901. I have taken all of the versions presented here from *Tōson's Collected Poems*, 1904, and have included both the original Japanese text and my own English translations. I have attempted to faithfully preserve the original printed representation of these poems.

『秋』

秋は来ぬ

秋は来ぬ

一葉は花は露ありて

風の来て弾く琴の音に

あおいき葡萄は紫の

自然の酒とかはりけり

秋は来ぬ

秋は来ぬ

おくれさきだつ秋草も

みな夕霜のおきどころ

笑ひの酒を悲みの

杯にこそつぐべけれ

秋は来ぬ

秋は来ぬ

くさきも紅葉するものを

たれかは秋によはざらん

知恵あり顔のさみしさに

君笛を吹けわれはうたはむ<sup>9</sup>

“Autumn”

Autumn has come

Autumn has come

One of the flower's leaves is covered with dew

Wind has come, the sound of a plucked *koto*

The blue grape becomes a purple

Natural alcohol!

Autumn has come

Autumn has come

The autumn grasses that are late to die

Are all shelves for evening frost

It is into the cup of sadness that one should pour

The sake of laughter

Autumn has come

Autumn has come

Plants turn autumn colors

Is there anyone who isn't drunk in autumn?

In the sadness of a wise face



You play the flute, and I will sing.

The compilers of the *Manyōshū* chose to organize their collection by season, beginning with early spring and ending with late winter. Thus, the *tanka* and *chōka* in the first anthology of Japanese poetry were meticulously arranged to create flow and a sense of the passage of time, evoking in the author the sentiments of each season in an emotional as well as a temporal journey. Just as in the *Manyōshū*, Tōson's first collection of poetry, *Collection of Young Herbs*, 1897, is also arranged in accordance with the seasons. However, Tōson's collection begins not with spring but with autumn, which is also the title of the opening poem. In both classical Japanese and much of Western Romanticism, autumn evokes a feeling of bitterness and cold, a movement away from the vibrant virility of summer to the harsh reality of winter, which is often used as a metaphor for death. After the suicide of Tōkoku, Tōson's friend and mentor, the death in childbirth of Sukeko, his first love, his mother's cancer diagnosis, and the poverty he lived through in the years leading up to the publication of *Collection of Young Herbs*, it is easy to understand why Tōson's first collection begins in autumn. Though spring is bound to come in due time, one must first survive the cold heartlessness of winter. Spring feels so distant that one begins to wonder whether it will come at all. In the end, though, the reader does arrive at spring, which comes toward the end of *Collection of Young Herbs*. Tōson's next collection would be called *Summer Grass*. This gradual seasonal shift shows a parallel shift in Tōson's outlook on life. When *Collection of Young Herbs* opens, he has just dealt with a seemingly never-ending string of tragedies. The longer he spent in Sendai writing poetry, though, the more his spirits rose and the more he felt comforted by the more rural landscape that surrounded him for the first time since his childhood.

From the first line, “Autumn” introduces interesting changes from and similarities to classical Japanese *tanka*. The five-mora<sup>10</sup> opening line of “Autumn” gives the beginning of the poem the same rhythm as is found in reading the first line of a *tanka* or a haiku. The seasonal

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10 I distinguish between mora and syllable for the purpose of describing Japanese poetry. A mora is a phonological unit that is used to describe a single sound in Japanese and is sometimes, though not always, different from a syllable. In Japanese, these moras consist of either a stand-alone vowel, a consonant-vowel pair (such as *ka*), the nasal *n* sound, a character consisting of a consonant, a small “y” sound, and a vowel (such as *kyo*), and the small *tsu* that indicates a long consonant sound. For example, the name Shimazaki Tōson would be six syllables in English but is made up of eight Japanese mora. Japanese traditional *tanka* have a 5-7-5-7-7 mora structure.

word also recalls classical Japanese poetry, as traditional haiku contain season words and traditional *tanka* also often deal with seasons and their emotional connotations. As one of the oldest structured forms of Japanese poetry and the form that a majority of Tōson's audience would have been familiar with, if not intimately so, this opening line firmly places “Autumn” in the realm of classical Japanese poetry. However, this rhythm is somewhat disrupted by the second line of the poem, which causes the reader to step back and look at the piece in a different way.

Though the opening line makes the reader think of the rhythm of *tanka* and haiku, the second line, which is a repetition of the first, evokes a slightly different feeling. Firstly, the physical placement of the line is interesting. The second line is indented, which in the original Japanese format, written from top to bottom rather than left to right, means that the second line is lower than the first and begins almost at the point where the first line ends. I have attempted to recreate this feeling in my English translation of the poem. The third line, “Wind has come, the sound of a plucked *koto*” evokes a sort of barrenness, a beautiful but forlorn sound that rings for only a moment before it fades into nothingness. This reference to ephemeral music is somewhat reminiscent of one of Wordsworth's poems. In “The Solitary Reaper,” Wordsworth writes, “I listened till I had my fill:/And, as I mounted up the hill,/The music in my heart I bore,/Long after it was heard no more” (Wordsworth 223, lines 29-32). Though the music itself lasts only for a short time, the speaker carries the sound with him long after it has faded away. In “Autumn” one gets the sense that the speaker has done the same thing, taking the forlorn sound of the wind and making it into a form of music in his heart. In both of these works the act of internalizing a short note or piece of music develops a second, structural layer because the speaker has also memorialized this music in the poem.

The second and third stanzas, which are shorter than the first and last stanzas, evoke the fleeting nature of life itself. Here, the autumn grasses that still cling to life have become nothing more than places where frost can collect. One gets the sense that they wither slowly, waiting only to die. The image of frost on withering leaves is reminiscent of the human aging process—the frost represents how our hair turns grey and white in old age, and the image of bent grasses, sagging under the weight of frost, recalls the stooped form of an old person, weighed down by their collected experiences.

In the final stanza, “autumn has come” is repeated once again, following the same visual structure as in the first and second stanzas. Here, the abstract sense of the season that we get from these first two lines is made concrete in the third line, “plants turn autumn colors.” Though they are heralded for their beauty, the yellow, red, and orange leaves of autumn represent a temporary death, a movement from the liveliness of summer to the quiet solitude of winter. The reference to drinking shows the human tendency to seek out others in the colder seasons of the year and to find warmth both in their company and in alcohol, which dulls the senses to the bitterness of the coming winter season. The idea of drinking to forget the bad things that have happened in the past is an important one here, and reflects the author's own personal struggles in the time leading up to the publication of *Collection of Young Herbs*. The final line ties together the forlorn and the slightly optimistic strains that run through the rest of the poem. The narrator and his companion will sing and play the flute respectively, joining in with the wind's autumn song and perhaps making it just a bit less lonely. They will face the hard times together and will seek solace in each other, in alcohol, and in the creativity and imagination of music. This poem rings with the bitterness of autumn and the coming winter, but it also speaks of moments of warmth found in autumn, the warmth of drinking alcohol with one's friends and the beauty of leaves turning from green to yellow, red, and orange before they fall.

This poem's opening mora structure and its reference to temporal season words and feelings, particularly bitterness as the warmth and life of summer descends into winter, give it a classical Japanese flavor that contemporary readers would have recognized. However, it also rings with the style and voice of Western Romantic poetry. Byron writes in an opening piece for *Don Juan*, “Because at least the past were past away—/And for the future—(but I write this reeling/Having got drunk exceedingly today/So that I seem to stand upon the ceiling)/I say—the future is a serious matter—” (Byron, 678, lines 3-7). In this poem and in “Autumn,” drinking places the speaker outside of time in a way that makes him able to reflect on both the past and the future. In this state, both the past and the future seem equally unimportant, which makes absurd our tendency as humans to dwell on the past and worry about the future. The present moment becomes the only one that is truly meaningful, and it is this moment of reflection and detachment that both Byron's and Tōson's narrators find in these poems.

In this poem, Tōson also plays with Japanese grammar in a way that gives it both

classical Japanese and Western Romantic meaning. The use of the classical auxiliary verb *keri* represents this phenomenon of double meaning. In classical Japanese, *keri* is a conjugating suffix that attaches to verbs or other auxiliary verbs to give one of several meanings, the most relevant in this case being a sense of revelation. In this meaning, *keri*, which appears at the end of the first stanza, is often translated into English as an exclamation point or an exclamation like “ah!” or “oh!” In “Autumn,” this exclamation carries both a revelatory feel from classical Japanese and a sense of the spontaneous emotion and awe that are common to Romantic poetry.

Tōson's experiments with traditional and divergent poetic structure and the mixture of *tanka* themes and themes from Western Romanticism in “Autumn” make it strong representative of the *shintaiishi* reform movement. In this poem, Tōson shows that classical *tanka* rhythm, using mora in sets of 5 and 7, could be combined with more Western themes and stanza structure without diminishing the beauty of integrity of each style. Tomasi writes that “the *genbun itchi* style eventually emerged as the answer to the quest for a literary mode that would satisfy the prerequisites of intelligibility, versatility, and refinement. The new form of expression had to be a relatively simple linguistic medium understandable by even the less erudite; at the same time, to triumph over traditional styles, regarded highly among scholars and intellectuals, it had to be aesthetically pleasing” (“Quest for a New Written Language” 333). This is what Tōson has done in “Autumn”—he has created a work that is beautiful and lyrical without being overly difficult to read or understand. Though it does contain some remainders from classical Japanese grammar, like *keri*, even modern readers should not have much difficulty understanding it.

Later on in *Collection of Young Herbs* comes a series of poems about the season changing to spring, one of which, entitled “Spring Has Come,” follows a similar pattern to “Autumn.”

『春：三 春は来ぬ』

春は来ぬ

春は来ぬ

初音やさしきうぐひすよ

こぞに別離を告げよかし

谷間に残る白雪よ

葬りかくせ去歳の冬

春は来ぬ

春は来ぬ

さみしくさむくことばなく

まづしくくらくひかりなく  
みにくくおもくちからなく  
かなしき冬よ行きねかし

春は来ぬ

春は来ぬ

浅みどりなる新草よ  
とほき野面をえがけかし  
さきては紅き春花よ  
樹々の梢を染めよかし

春は来ぬ

春は来ぬ

霞よ雲よ動ぎいで  
氷れる空をあたためよ  
花の香おくる春風よ  
眠れる山を吹きさませ

春は来ぬ

春は来ぬ

春をよせくる朝夕よ  
蘆の枯葉を洗ひ去れ  
霞に酔へる雛鶴よ  
若きあしたの空に飛べ

春は来ぬ

春は来ぬ

うれひの芹の根を絶えて  
氷れるなみだ今いづこ  
つもれる雪の消えうせて  
けふの若菜と萌えよかし<sup>11</sup>

“Spring Has Come”

Spring has come

Spring has come

The first sound, the gentle nightingale!  
It is good that we said our farewells last year  
The white snow that remains between the valleys!  
Last year's winter, buried and hidden

Spring has come

Spring has come

These are not cold, lonely words  
This is not a dim, poor light

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11 *Tōson's Collected Poems*, 1904, 80-82

This is not an unsightly, heavy energy  
The sad winter has gone!

Spring has come  
    Spring has come  
New grasses, pale green!  
Painting the far-off fields  
Red spring flowers are blooming!  
Dyeing the tips of the branches

Spring has come  
    Spring has come  
The mist! The clouds! They are leaving  
Warm the icy sky!  
The spring wind that brings the scent of the flowers!  
Cooling the sleeping mountains

Spring has come  
    Spring has come  
The morning tide that draws in spring!  
Wash away the dead leaves of the reeds  
Young cranes drunk on the mist  
Fly to the young morning sky

Spring has come  
    Spring has come  
The parsley roots of grief die out  
Where are the frozen tears now?  
Banked snow disappears  
Today young greens are sprouting.

In both classical Japanese *tanka* and Western Romantic poetry, spring is the season of new life, of rebirth, and of the joy of life itself. Whereas winter is a cold, solitary time when the world seems to halt and where the joys of the past year seem far away, spring is bright and warm and filled with life. Though, as is the case in “Autumn,” the narrator is a solitary wanderer, the change in seasons has brought about a change in his perspective. In “Spring Has Come,” we see far more emphatic particles in the original Japanese, generally translated as exclamation marks, than we do in “Autumn.” The use of these emphatic particles is common in classical *tanka*, but it is also an element of the spontaneity of poetry and awe that is often expressed in Western Romantic poetry. Having been influenced by both of these styles, the use of emphatic particles

in this poem reflects spontaneity and the overpowering nature of emotions as they were expressed in both forms—in fact, this is one of the stylistic areas in which classical *tanka* and Western Romantic poetry are the most harmonious.

In terms of structure, “Spring Has Come” represents both a part of a pattern and a deviation from “Autumn.” Noticeably, it follows the same opening structure as “Autumn,” though it is the first in a series of poems about spring in a larger section under that title, which explains why the titles of the individual poems “Autumn” and “Spring Has Come” are not in the same format. As in “Autumn,” the first two lines repeat that the season has come and follow the same interesting pattern of structural deviation on the page, meaning that the second line is indented and begins almost where the first printed line ends. The lines in each stanza are of similar lengths in both poems, with the two opening lines being of five moras each and the following lines being of twelve. Though this deviates from the classical *tanka* structure, the flow and rhythm it creates still evokes the 5-7-5 mora pattern. The poems are different lengths—“Autumn” has four stanzas, three with the repeating opening lines “autumn has come” and one intervening stanza, the third, a shorter couplet that somewhat disrupts the structure, while “Spring Has Come” has six, all of which have the repeating opening lines “spring has come”—which may simply show discrepancies in Tōson's inspiration for each poem but which also, a metaphorical sense, represents hope for the future. In other words, spring represents a new beginning, a rebirth, and from the beginning of spring autumn and winter seem distant. How difficult is it to imagine a landscape blanketed in feet of snow when the grass is still green?

Taken in a more autobiographical way, “Spring Has Come” represents Tōson's hope and optimism at moving to Sendai after suffering such a long string of tragedies and hardships. The move to Sendai was the breath of fresh air that his body, his spirit, and his creative drive needed, and that sense of rebirth is captured eloquently in this poem. The sadness and solitude of winter have gone, taking the snow and mist with them, and have been replaced by the song of the “gentle nightingale,” the pale green of grass sprouting in the fields, and the first dazzling hint of color brought by budding flowers. It is hard to be depressed in such a season, a fact that is driven home by the repetition in the second stanza, where the narrator asserts that “These are not cold, lonely words/This is not a dim, poor light/This is not an unsightly, heavy energy” (lines 9-11). Parallel images also serve to strengthen the threads of rebirth and hope that run through

“Spring Has Come.” The first of these images is that of the spring wind bringing in the scent of the newly budding flowers (line 23). The wind is a natural force, but here it is personified to a certain extent. The same wind that brings this scent of new life also brings the narrator's sense of hope and joy. The next image comes in the following stanza and is that of “the morning tide,” which is described as drawing in spring itself (line 27). This tide draws in spring and, when it recedes, takes the dead, dried husks of winter away with it. In this way, “Spring Has Come” expresses the physical renewal and rebirth of the landscape and the parallel sense of personal renewal and rebirth experienced by the narrator, who in turn represents the personal renewal and rebirth that Tōson experienced when he moved back to the country after so many years in Tokyo.

These two parallel seasonal poems are reminiscent of a desire to share the beauty of nature that Wordsworth spoke of in his poetry and other writing. In a letter, Wordsworth once wrote, “I love fields & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness—and because I have found benevolence & quietness growing within me as that fondness [has] increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others” (Zimmerman 82-3). Having grown up with rural surroundings, Tōson would have understood this feeling of peace and of nature bringing internal growth and healing. Furthermore, Tōson's poetry also rings of what Wordsworth writes about in this letter, namely the desire to share with other people through poetry the joy and benevolence that comes from being in nature. In this way, the seasonal change in these poems also reflects a personal change in the narrator.

This sense of finding yourself through nature is common in Romantic poetry. It is easy to see the change in the narrator's voice between autumn and spring and the effect that the changing seasons and the new growth of spring has on his emotions. This is reflected in Wallace Stevens's poem “Tea at the Palaz of Hoon.” In this poem, the narrator explains that, “I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw/Or heard or felt came not but from myself;/And there I found myself more truly and more strange” (Stevens 65, lines 10-12). In this poem, the wanderer becomes one with nature and no longer identifies as a separate being. Everything that he sees, hears, and feels immediately becomes internalized and registers not as something outside but as something within him, reflecting his sense of identity and also changes in how he perceives himself. Through this intimacy with nature, the narrator finds himself “more truly” as well as “more strange.” This sense of personal reflection and growth through experiencing



nature, especially alone, is also reflected in Tōson's life, and it is important that his move to Sendai and later to Komoro sparked the period of productive writing that would result in his publication of four collections of poetry in four years. Though one cannot say that the speaker in Tōson's poems is directly Tōson himself, Tōson uses this poetic voice and the often first-person character of the narrator to express many of the emotions and changes that he himself would have experienced during the time that he was writing poetry.

The notion of sharing one's emotions through poetry and thus using poetry to help other people experience some of the personal growth and change that one has undergone through interacting with nature had an important influence on Tōson's writing and serves to connect his work to the *shintaiishi* movement. One of the driving forces behind the *shintaiishi* movement and its advocates was the idea that classical Japanese poetry was too constricted, both in terms of how well it describes the author's experiences and voice and in terms of how other people related to it. The *shintaiishi* movement aimed to play with form in order to best express the content of the poem, which was often related to contemporary experiences like the growing Western influence and the rapid modernization and industrialization, including governmental and educational reform, after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. As Japan's rural areas were quickly becoming absorbed into industrial urban centers, the appreciation of pristine nature took on a more desperate quality. This was a time of great change and, though many of the changes, like the disbanding of the Edo period social hierarchy, had roots that extended far before the Meiji Restoration, Tōson's generation experienced them in dizzying number. Finding one's own voice and distinguishing that from voices that had come before became a major concern and struggle for young contemporary writers like Tōson. Not only widening the scope of poetic form and structure to better represent contemporary experiences but also a desire to reach a wider audience was also important to the *shintaiishi* movement. The *shintaiishi* movement called for a representation of the experiences and joys of common Japanese people, which necessitated at least a partial change in language and grammar use to widen the readership of poetry and of literature in general. Tōson's poems combine a variety of forms that better express the emotions and experiences, such as the restorative qualities of wandering in nature, that he wanted to express through writing with grammatical forms and a written structure that would have been much easier for common Japanese people to read than classical works. Hurley writes that “for

many intellectuals and writers, the novelty, spectacle, and shock of “modern life” became synonymous with dislocation from familiar social patterns, alienation from traditional cultural values, and subsumption into a homogenized global idiom of commoditized surfaces devoid of spiritual depths” (Hurley 361). Advocates of the *shintaisshi* movement wanted to create new spiritual depth in literature that contemporary people could relate to, and this is exactly what Tōson does in his poetry. This is why he is considered to be one of the poets who most successfully adapted the aims of the *shintaisshi* movement into his work.

The next poem that I will discuss, “Morning Star,” is also from *Collection of Young Herbs* and expresses the idea of becoming one with nature. In this poem, the narrator's body joins with the star as it moves closer to the realm of man. This union represents rebirth through the image of the new morning.

『明星』  
 浮べる雲と身をなして  
 あしたの空に出でざれば  
 などしるらめや明星の  
 光の色のくれなういを

朝の潮と身をなして  
 流れて海に出でざれば  
 などしるらめや明星の  
 清みて哀しききらめきを

なにかこひしき暁星の  
 空しき天の戸を出でて  
 深くも遠きほとりより  
 人の世近く来るとは

潮の朝のあさみどり  
 水底深き白石を  
 星の光に透かし見て  
 朝の齢を数ふべし

野の鳥ぞ啼く山河も  
 ゆふべの夢をさめいでて  
 細く棚引くしののめの  
 姿をうつす朝ぼらけ

小夜には小夜のしらべあり  
 朝には朝の音もあれど  
 星の光の絲の緒に

あしたの琴は静なり

まだうら若き朝の空  
 きらめきわたる星のうら  
 いといと若き光をば  
 名けましかば明星と<sup>12</sup>

“Morning Star”

Floating clouds become my body  
 If you do not go out into the morning sky  
 I wonder why you understand? The morning star's  
 Light is safflower in color!

The morning tide becomes my body  
 If you do not flow out to the ocean  
 I wonder why you understand? The morning star  
 Clears and glimmers sadly

Some yearned for morning star  
 Went out through the door of the empty heavens  
 From a deep, far-off place  
 You come close to the world of man

The tide is the light green of morning  
 A white stone deep on the ocean floor!  
 I look through the light of the star  
 I can count the age of the morning

The birds on the plains sing, rivers and mountains too  
 Evening dreams come out  
 Pull the shelf finely, dawn's  
 Shape reflects the light of dawn

In evening there is evening's tune  
 Even though there is also the sound of morning in morning  
 The star's light is the string  
 The morning *koto* is silent

The still-youthful morning sky  
 Behind the glimmering star  
 The very young light!  
 If I were to name you, it would be “morning star.”

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12 *Tōson's Collected Poems*, 1904, 89-91

“Morning Star” is another example of a poem in which Tōson uses a non-traditional mora pattern to create a certain rhythm. In this poem, each line is twelve mora in length, often with a natural stopping place or pause after the first seven mora. This is a pattern that I have discussed in several of Tōson's other poems so far, though the pattern of a pause after the first seven mora rather than the first five is a reversal of the structure of some of his other works. While the twelve-mora line is still evocative of a *tanka* rhythm, the break after the first seven mora creates a slightly different feel while retaining the overall flow of the piece. This is an example of Tōson as a *shintaiishi* poet who plays with structure in order to best suit the content of each poem. The twelve-mora line is also relatively close to Western iambic pentameter, which Tōson would have been aware of and which means that the rhythm reads not unlike a Western poem. Having read and translated Shakespeare and poets like Wordsworth and Blake, who also often wrote in iambic pentameter, iambic tetrameter, and other similar syllabic structures, Tōson would have been intimately familiar with the sense of even, rolling rhythm created by these styles. In this way, the mora structure in “Morning Star” reflects stylistic elements from both classical Japanese and Western poetry and shows that these two styles can be used in harmony.

In “Morning Star,” as in “Autumn” and “Spring Has Come,” the speaker reflects on becoming one with nature. The opening line of the poem reads “floating clouds become my body,” a direct reference to the speaker's oneness with nature. This line is also paralleled in the opening line of the second stanza, which reads “the morning tide becomes my body.” In this poem, the morning star, which may also represent the planet Venus,<sup>13</sup> gradually comes closer to the realm of men, both physically, as seen in the lines, “from a deep, far-off place/you come close to the world of man” (lines 11-12) and internally, as the speaker begins to “look through the light of the star” and associate its influences, including on the sky and on the tides, with his own being.

This is the second of Tōson's poems that I have discussed which makes reference to music and musical instruments, namely the *koto*, which is also mentioned in “Autumn.” The *koto* has a sad, solitary but hauntingly beautiful sound in both poems. In “Autumn,” it is the sound of the wind blowing across a barren plain. In “Morning Star,” it is an instrument of the

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13 The original kanji in the poem, 明星, literally reads “morning star” or “dawn star” but is often also used to mean the planet Venus.

morning, heralding the end of night and the coming of the morning star.

Here, as with the new life associated with the change of seasons in “Spring Has Come,” the morning star represents rebirth and regeneration. In the middle of the poem, the speaker “can count the age of the morning” (line 16), and the final stanza is all about the youthful nature of the sky and the morning star, which exudes a “very young light” (line 27). The even, rolling rhythm created by the mora structure and the poem's seven-stanza length gives the work a feel of cyclical movement in which the reader comes to a new beginning brought about by the repeated rebirth of the morning star.

The notion of rebirth is one that all contemporary Japanese people would have been able to understand. The sense of cultural rebirth after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 was one that heavily colored the formative years of Tōson's youth, and as he was writing poetry the opening of a new century brought a sense of rebirth not only to Japan but to the world. One goal of the *shintaiishi* movement was to create a literature that represented the sufferings, joys, and everyday lives of common Japanese people. In this way, “The Morning Star” is a representative work of *shintaiishi* because it encapsulates experiences and emotions that would have been easy for normal Japanese people to relate to.

The final poem that I will discuss, “By the Old Castle of Komoro,” is from a later collection than the first three poems and was written after Tōson had moved from Sendai to Komoro, another rural town only a short distance from his hometown. It continues on with the theme of the wandering poet and the restorative power of personal reflection in nature.

『小諸なる古城のほとり』

小諸なる古城のほとり  
雲白く遊子悲しむ  
緑なす藜藿は萌えず  
若草も藉くによしなし  
しろがねの衾の岡部  
日に溶けて淡雪流る

あたたかき光はあれど  
野に満つる香も知らず  
浅くのみ春は霞みて  
麦の色わづかに青し  
旅人の群はいくつか  
島中の道を急ぎぬ

暮れ行けば浅間も見えず  
 歌哀し佐久の草笛  
 千曲川いざよふ波の  
 岸近き宿にのぼりつ  
 濁り酒濁れる飲みて  
 草枕しばし慰む<sup>14</sup>

“By the Old Castle of Komoro”

By the old castle of Komoro  
 The clouds are white, the wanderer laments.  
 Green checkweed does not sprout  
 And young grass is too thin to sit on.  
 The hillside is blanketed in silver  
 Which melts in the sun and flows as a light snowfall.

Though the light is warm,  
 The scent that fills the fields is yet to be known.  
 The shallow spring is only hazy  
 And the color of the wheat is slightly pale.  
 Several groups of travelers  
 Hurry along the path between the fields.

As the day darkens, Asama disappears  
 A Saku grass flute's sad song.  
 I climb to an inn near the banks  
 Of the Chikuma River's hesitant waves.  
 I drink unfiltered sake  
 And forget my worries for a while.

“By the Old Castle of Komoro” is the first poem in *Collection of Fallen Plums* (落梅集, *Rakubaishū*), 1901, Tōson's final collection of poetry. As with the other poems that I have discussed, this poem contains elements of both classical Japanese *tanka* poetry and Western Romantic poetry, namely the character of a lone wanderer poet who sees the natural landscape as a reflection of his inner feelings. As in “Autumn” and “Spring Has Come,” this poem contains strong temporal and seasonal cues. The season in this poem is most likely late winter or early spring, when the sunlight has begun to grow a little bit warmer but the spring plants have yet to grow. Spring is still “shallow” and “hazy,” a double-entendre that here refers both to spring mist, which is a common seasonal word in *tanka*, and to the fact that the season of spring itself has yet

<sup>14</sup> Tōson's *Collected Poems*, 1904, 388-90

to solidify and is thus still hazy or misty. Groups of travelers hurry along in view of the speaker, but one does not get the feeling that they interact—though they are all travelers absorbed in their own destination. However, as with many travelers in Romantic poetry, the narrator in this poem does not seem to have a destination. He is simply a lamenting wanderer, taking solace in a warm place for the night and drinking to forget whatever it is that he laments before the chilly sun rises again and he must continue on his way, wandering through the landscape and watching the spring slowly come to life. At this point in his life, Tōson probably felt that he too was a wanderer without a destination. He had lived in three places in the span of just five years and would soon move again, this time to return to Tokyo.

The setting of the poem, Komoro, is one that Tōson had direct experience of. In fact, he was living in Komoro during the time that this poem was written and would write about the landscape of the area in several more works, including “Chikuma River Sketches,”<sup>15</sup> in which Tōson practiced his prose style by writing about the landscape and the people that he encountered while wandering through Komoro and the surrounding area. The Chikuma River is also an important setting in his first novel, *The Broken Commandment*, 1906. In this poem, the speaker describes the Chikuma River's waves as “hesitant,” using a Japanese phrase that literally means to come and go without actually making progress or proceeding forward. This acts as a metaphor for the speaker's wandering. Though he comes and goes, he never actually gets anywhere. The sake that he drinks is unfiltered or cloudy, an image that recalls the muddy, swirling waters of a river that is always flowing back on itself. In his analysis of several of Tōson's poems, Morita argues that the wandering figure in this poem should be read as a symbol for Tōson himself, implying that this poetry is a precursor to Tōson's later confessional or autobiographical novels. Morita writes, “Tōson's soul wandered, and wandering was a major theme of his poetry. Starting from the formless ardor of springtime, Tōson journeyed in search of a resting place for his soul, something more concrete and secure, the land to which he could return” (Morita 359). Because Tōson did not really have a stable home in his childhood, moving from rural Magome to Tokyo and being shunted between relatives and family acquaintances without much of a sense of belonging anywhere, Morita argues that this longing for a sense of place is a central theme in Tōson's poetry. In the three poems that I have analyzed thus far, the

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15 *Chikumagawa no Suketchi*, 『千曲川のスケッチ』, 1912 (add publishing company/info)

narrator is a wanderer who fights off both his own inner turmoil and the chill of the natural world, especially with alcohol. Nature becomes the place that he has longed for and the vehicle through which he comes to find and redefine himself. The solitary musical note, in “Autumn” a gust of wind that sounds like a *koto* and in “By the Old Castle of Komoro” a “grass flute’s sad song,” personifies nature as commiserating with the speaker’s emotional isolation. Though the speaker is alone in nature and must face the hardships of the colder seasons, the fact that the landscape is personified as reflecting his suffering indicates that he is less alone when he is wandering in nature. Though he is lamenting, the landscape laments with him. The “checkweed does not sprout” and the “young grass is too thin to sit on,” meaning that, though the springtime plants will inevitably grow, for the time being they remain in the clutches of winter. The spring sunlight is beginning to grow warm, but the scents of spring that come with it are yet to appear. Other travelers pass him by, but the only things that he really stops to notice are parts of the landscape that surround him, and likewise these are the only things to which he feels that he can relate.

One of the most interesting and unique aspects of “By the Old Castle of Komoro” is its mora pattern. Though at first glance this poem does not seem to adhere to a classical Japanese rhythm, this sense of movement and flow is hiding within each of the poem’s lines. Each of these lines is twelve mora long and can be broken into two segments, the first being a five-mora segment and the second being a seven-mora segment. In reading each line in its original Japanese, one finds a natural pause between these two segments that gives the poem a rhythm like the two opening lines of a *tanka* or a haiku, a structure that he often uses in his work. Furthermore, the repetition of these twelve-mora lines gives one the feel of a *tanka* that is beginning again and again, building in a circular rhythm that leaves the reader not with a sense of completeness or finality but with a sense of indefinite wandering that reflects the poem’s content. The fact that the structure of Tōson’s poems often reflects their content and substance is an innovation that adds layers of meaning to his works, and I argue that this is one of the reasons why Tōson’s poetry did indeed have an effect on the literary language reform movement in the decades to come.

“By the Old Castle of Komoro” is in several ways reminiscent of Wordsworth’s famous poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” Tōson read Wordsworth extensively, and it is likely that



he was familiar with this poem, which is considered to be one of Wordsworth's most famous works. The poem follows an ababcc rhyme pattern and iambic tetrameter, which means that its lines are four iambic feet<sup>16</sup> in length. Though “By the Old Castle of Komoro” follows a different mora pattern, each line is roughly twelve mora in length, which creates a movement that feels not unlike the rhythm in Wordsworth's poem. One of the most important connections between these two works is their thematic focus on wandering or the person of a wanderer. Wordsworth's poem is in the first person and, while a first-person pronoun is not present in “By the Old Castle of Komoro,” the implied narrator could easily be taken to be speaking to the reader from a first-person perspective.

The first stanza of “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” reads, “I wandered lonely as a cloud/That floats on high o'er vales and hills,/When all at once I saw a crowd/A host, of golden daffodils;/Beside the lake, beneath the trees,/Fluttering and dancing in the breeze” (Wordsworth 236, lines 1-6). This stanza introduces several ideas that are also present in “By the Old Castle of Komoro.” First of all, it establishes the fact that the narrator is a wanderer and is by nature wandering alone through a natural landscape. The first line introduces a negative element of this wanderer's solitude, namely that he is “lonely,” just as the wanderer in Tōson's poem “laments” (line 2). Over the course of the next several lines, though, the narrator realizes that he is not in fact alone because nature is all around him, personified as “a crowd/A host, of golden daffodils” (lines 3-4). Nature becomes a comfort and an audience to the poem itself. The same is true of the natural environment in Tōson's poem—though the other travelers that the narrator sees hurry on without interacting with him, nature is an open and willing audience to his verse. In both of these poems, then, there is also a layered feeling created by the fact that the narrator identifies as the author of the poem. In “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” the narrator realizes that the daffodils are his audience and exclaims, “A poet could not be but gay,/In such a jocund company:/I gazed—and gazed—but little thought/What wealth the show to me had brought” (lines 15-18). This creates a feeling of spontaneity surrounding the composition of the poem but also an element of reflection after the fact in which the poet narrator realizes things about his surroundings and his emotions that he did not realize in the original moment that the poem was

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16 An iambic foot consists of one stressed and one unstressed syllable. This means that each line in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” follows a general length of eight syllables.

composed. This creates both an atmosphere of intimate reflection and draws the reader into the poem as an active participant, not a static member of an audience but a viewer of the change in the poet narrator's perspective. This feeling of growth is essential to the power of both poems and to the ways in which readers relate to them.

As with the other poems that I have discussed, “By the Old Castle of Komoro” represents many of the aspects of poetic reform that the *shintaiishi* movement advocated. Its mora structure, which is reminiscent of but not identical to the 5-7-5-7-7 structure of *tanka*, is an example of adapting the form of a poem to better suit its content. Secondly, this poem shares the theme of a wandering poet narrator with much of Western Romantic poetry and shows that Western poetic influence could find a place in and indeed could even help to rejuvenate Japanese poetry without destroying its rhythm or beauty. Thirdly, Tōson uses a combination of classical grammar and more contemporary language to make his poem easier to understand, increasing its potential readership and bringing normal citizens into the dialogue of his work. The themes in “By the Old Castle of Komoro,” including a reflection on nature and the act of forgetting one's sorrows through alcohol and quiet contemplation, are themes that many contemporary Japanese people, not limited to the wealthy or highly educated, would have been able to understand and identify with. “By the Old Castle of Komoro” is a good example of a *shintaiishi* poem and helps to prove that Tōson's poetry was influential in the literary language reform movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

In this way, Tōson's poetry was influential in the literary reform movement because it showed that the changes supported by the advocates of the *shintaiishi* movement could be actuated. Tōson's poetry often retains elements of classical *tanka* poetry, including themes that deal with nature and with personal reflection as well as a 5-7 mora pattern, while breaking away from the more rigid classical 5-7-5-7-7 form and exploring different structures in terms of rhythm and the use of stanzas. Though he does retain some classical language and grammatical configurations, Tōson also uses more updated colloquial vocabulary and grammar in his poetry. This makes his work easier to read and thus accessible to a wider audience, who could also relate to its themes, especially because the narrators of Tōson's poems speak in a way that draws readers into a reflection on their own lives as well as their relationship to nature. Creating poetry that represented the everyday struggles, joys, and experiences of common Japanese people was

one of the goals of the *shintaiishi* movement, and Tōson achieves this through his use of more contemporary language and the narratorial voices that run through his pieces. Finally, Tōson's poems share many similarities with Western Romantic poetry, including harmony of form and content, the character of a lone wanderer, the notion of poetic spontaneity and awe at the beauty and suffering contained within nature, and a sense of personal reflection, growth, and regeneration tied to experiences in the natural world. As one of the most successful representatives of the *shintaiishi* school, Tōson's work was influential in demonstrating that colloquial language, classical language, Japanese culture, and themes from Western thought and poetry could coexist within Japanese literature.

Though the *shintaiishi* movement and other arguments under the general heading of the *genbun'itchi* movement were widespread and gaining momentum in the late 1800s and early 1900s, it took a long time for actual, widespread change to be enacted. Much of the early work was done by authors like Tōson who began to introduce more colloquial vocabulary and grammar into their works while remaining important, highly acclaimed literary figures. These authors helped to show that the colloquial language had a place in Japanese literature, even in high Japanese literature. Newspapers were one of the first forms of written media to adapt to more colloquial patterns of language use, and by the 1920s most newspapers had updated their language in order to reach a wider audience. Literacy rates and access to education continued to rise throughout the 1800s, and switching to a more colloquial style of writing was one of the most successful ways to raise the circulation of a newspaper, magazine, or other piece of writing. However, less than a decade after this switch to more colloquial language began to take off in the media, Japan entered a fifteen-year period of war, ultranationalism, mass indoctrination of the public, and censorship in all forms of the media, especially literature. Many authors stopped writing during this time to preserve the integrity of their work. It was not until after the end of World War Two that ideas from the *genbun'itchi* movement became actualized on a national scale.

These periods of great change in the past century of Japanese history have also impacted how Tōson's work has been interpreted. At the time of their publication, Tōson's works, especially his novels, were often in the public eye. They were popular and accessible to the average reader while also well regarded in the literary world. He was considered an important

and even a central author in his own time, especially in emerging schools such as Japanese Naturalism. Tōson's works were “rediscovered” in the 1930s and were assigned new cultural meaning by nationalist critics in a Japan buoyed by perceived successes in war. Bourdaghs says of this “rediscovery” that “Tōson's works were resituated in national literary history to render them suitable to the demands of wartime nationalism...the postwar version of Tōson was shaped by, and in turn helped shape, a widespread resurgence in popular and cultural antistate nationalism in Japan” (32-4). As with many earlier authors, Tōson's works were appropriated to fit into a wartime version of Japan and Japanese culture that heralded the superiority of the state. Later on, after some of the illusion of wartime greatness had worn off, much of Japan's early postwar literature was consumed with the construction of a sense of identity or a dismissal of the political thrust to artificially create one. In regards to this shift, Bourdaghs comments, “if there is a difference between the prewar and postwar versions of Tōson, it is that in the more recent criticism, he is identified not simply with Japaneseness, but more precisely with a Japaneseness that postwar Japan supposedly lacks. In this more melancholic mode, the image of Tōson becomes a topos for soliciting nostalgia for a Japaneseness that is apparently wanting in the postwar readers” (39). It is in this position that Tōson's work often rests today. He is identified with a sense of traditional “Japaneseness” that is often perceived as being lacking in modern literature. His novels and those of contemporaries like Sōseki represent the peak of Japanese literature, the high point and the culmination of all of the centuries of writing that had come before them. It is in part for this reason that Tōson's poetry is often left by the wayside—it is seen as being a stepping stone in Tōson's career and one that led him to ultimately turn to the novel, which, as a higher form of literature, is necessarily more important. Ignoring the importance of Tōson's poems means ignoring nuances that are important to understanding both Tōson's life and career as a writer and the literary changes that were happening at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Unfortunately, Tōson's works are no longer commonly read outside of the literary world, particularly by younger people. When I was doing work on a different thesis at Kumamoto University in Japan in 2013, though all of the Japanese students I asked had heard of Tōson, none had read any of his work. As with many classical Western works, including those by Shakespeare and Chaucer, many older Japanese works are seen as being too “difficult” or even

too “boring” or “irrelevant” for people outside of the academic world to read. A close reading of these works, though, helps us understand both their beauty and the vast impact that they have had not only on present-day literature but also on history and the development of modern culture. For these reasons, acknowledging the influence that Tōson's poetry had on literary changes in the last hundred years of Japanese history adds a deeper level of subtlety to our understanding of the development of Japanese literature throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the present day.

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